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ABSTRACT

While the trend for increasing numbers of women to enter the labor market is clear and career opportunities for women have expanded, women continue to be employed in occupations that are traditionally female and low-paying. This study examined childhood preferred play materials, structured and free play activities, and leisure time activities of women presently in traditional and nontraditional professions to investigate the antecedents of women's choices of careers in traditional versus nontraditional professions, with special focus on business as a profession. Independent variables antecedent to professional career choices focused on childhood socialization experiences through age 12 and included demographic variables relating to the subjects' childhood environment, family structure, parent characteristics, parental encouragement, and play. Subjects were 110 adult women from Mississippi, of whom 47 were in traditional professions, 25 were in moderately nontraditional professions, 15 were in highly nontraditional professions, and 23 were in business professions. Chi square and t-tests revealed significant differences among subgroups on several independent variables. Professional business women had participated more in competitive sports as children and (along with women in other nontraditional professions) reported more male playmates and fewer female playmates than did women in traditional professions. Women in nontraditional professions received different forms of parental encouragement than did women in traditional professions. (NB)

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CHILDHOOD ANTECEDENTS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

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The trend for increasing numbers of women to enter the labor market is clear and while career opportunities for women have expanded, women continue to be employed in occupations that are traditionally female and low-paying (U. S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1982). Therefore, further examination of factors which may be limiting females occupational choices and alternative is justified.

Research efforts designed to examine the effects of childhood socialization factors on career choice and career success in females have been done primarily through the study of career choices of college women. According to Williams & McCullers (1983) "relatively little research has been done with women who are actual participants in the labor force" (p. 345). Childhood socialization factors which have been

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examined include" ordinal position, maternal employment status, level of parental education and father's occupational status, the father-daughter relationship, and active encouragement of achievement efforts (Williams & McCullers, 1983). "One factor that has not been explored relative to early socialization experiences is the subjects' preferred play materials and activities during childhood and those endorsed by the subject's parents (Williams & McCullers, 1983, p. 345).

According to studies cited by Sage and Loudermilk (1979) "Sex role differentiation becomes established by the age of three and beliefs about sex-appropriate abilities, attitudes, and behavior begin to be acquired by the fifth year" (p. 88).

Rheingold and Cook (1975) found that parents tended to buy their sons more transportation toys, sports equipment, and military toys. For their daughters, they buy dolls, stuffed animals, and household toys.

Research suggests that gender specific toys may socialize children into stereotypic vocational choices. Toys may be viewed as offering experimentation with future roles and present an opportunity to rehearse a future occupational opportunity on the child's level (Kacerguis and Adams, 1979, p. 372).

Beuf (1974) states that toys provide cues to social limitations. Stereotypic toys may constrain boys and girls from having varied and valuable experiences.

Honig (1983) in an extensive review of the research of sex role socialization in early childhood, found parents to allow females the freedom to explore at a much later age than males. She suggests that giving messages that one is afraid of consequences with one sex but not another will teach fearfulness, not courage. Honig (1983) also suggests that some of the spatial advantages that males are consistently found to have (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974) may be because limitations are put on female uses of neighborhood space.

"Internalization of segregated gender behaviors and interests through play may contribute to the development of characteristics suitable for sex appropriate occupations . . . . boys gain skills in dealing with groups, girls are left out and do not learn the same traits which undoubtedly hinders them in any attempt to compete with males later in the broader society" (Chefetz, 1974, p. 80).

Henning and Jardim (1977) suggest that small boys through their involvement with team games, learn about teamwork, competition, practice, hardwork, and winning and losing. They further suggest:

> These ... learnings describe fairly closely a management environment in a corporate setting. They reflect skills an effective manager must rely upon ... These are personal skills. Boys begin to develop them in an outdoor classroom to which girls traditionally have had no access. After five to fifteen years of practice, men bring these skills with them to management jobs and they are skills critical to job performance." (p. 23)

Even more disturbing, Hennig and Jardim (1977) indicate that "girls come to regarded as inferior, second-rate, weaker and more timid than boys." (p. 50)

Unfortunately little girls may begin to share this view of their gender. Parsons and Ruble (1977) found girls' achievement oriented expectancies to be lower than boys (p. 50).

According to Kacerguis and Adams 91979) research suggests

> gender specific socialization practices may channel boys and girls into specific occupational directions . . . . For boys the process is one which appears to offer multiple occupational choices, although primarily masculine stereotyped in nature. For girls the consequences appear limiting. The central theme for girls is one of passivity and servitude (p. 373).

Hoffman (1972) states that the qualities needed for sustained top performance in professional pursuits, such as driving home a point, winning an argument, beating other in competition and not being side-tracked by concern with rapport are not typically part of a girl's make-up

When little boys are expanding their mastery strivings,

> learning instrumental independence, developing skills in coping with their environment and confidence in this ability, little girls are learning that effectiveness and safety-lie in their affectional relationships. (p. 137)

Galejs and Stockdale (1982) found girls to chose more cooperative than competitive responses than boys. In a later study Galejs, King, and Hegland (1986) reported that girls learn the expected classroom achievement-oriented behaviors sooner than boys.

Fouad and Kammer (1989) found that "women who choose a traditional career differ in their sex-role orientation, in the importance they place on work values, and show an interaction between work values and sex-role orientation such that a pattern of work values is clearly associated with a specific sex-role orientation." (p. 195)

Schuler (1979) states that the most highly valued traits for most managers are competence and power.

> This requires the manager to be directive and assertive when influencing others. Neither directiveness nor assertiveness are traits or characteristics females traditionally acquire in childhood. Males traditionally are socialized to be assertive and directive and females are socialized to be passive and cooperative. (p. 41)

Lever (1979) found a scarcity of recent work which focused on play and games as situations in which learning takes place. Her research implied that "boys' greater exposure to complex games may give them an advantage in occupational milieus that share structural features with those games" (p. 483)

> Boys' games provide a valuable learning environment. It is reasonable to expect the following social skills will be cultivated on the playground: the ability to deal with diversity ... the ability to coordinate actions and maintain cohesiveness among group members; the ability to cope with a set of impersonal rules and the ability to work for collective as well as personal goals.

On the other hand, Lever found girls' games to be free of structure or rules and concluded that "there is so much continuity between boys' play patterns and adult male roles that must consider whether games serve a particular socializing function." (1979)

The authors agree that play could be a major influence on career choice and achievement in professions not typically entered into by women. Therefore this study investigated childhood preferred play materials, structured and free play activities, and leisure time activities of women presently in traditional and non-traditional professions.

METHOD

Design. The study was designed to investigate the antecedents of women's choices of careers in traditional vs. nontraditional professions, with special focus on business as a profession.

Independent variables antecedent to professional career choices focused on childhood socialization experiences through the age of twelve years, including demographic variables relating to subjects' childhood environment, structure of the subjects' family of origin, characteristics of subjects' parents, types of parental encouragement of behaviors, and levels, types and forms of play, play materials and play companions of subjects.

The design facilitated the identification of significant differenences among the independent variables for professional women in four subgroups: women in traditional professions, women in moderately

nontraditional professions, and women in business-related professions at the managerial levels. Operational definitions for traditional and nontraditional professions were based upon descriptive data for the professions listed in Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1987. Traditional professions (e.g., public school teachers, librarians) were defined as those including at least 35% women, moderately nontraditional professions (e.g., insurance agents, research associates) were those made up of less than 20% women. Business professions (e.g., corporation executives, entrepreneurs) fell mostly within the moderately nontraditional category (based upon percentage of women) but were defined separately as those listed under managerial categories in Statistical Abstracts. (An effort was made to exclude any professions--such as college professors in the non-science fields--where women made up a percentage of the profession on the borderline of the traditional/nontraditional categories.)

Janet Lever's (1978) hierarchical model for play complexity was utilized to assess differences in levels of complexity of childhood play experiences for subjects. Lever's hierarchy was ordered on the variable of specialization of roles/division of labor of play groups, interdependence

among group members, size of groups, explicitness of group goal, number and specificity of impersonal rules, and action of members as a unified collective.

Subjects. One hundred ten adult women who comprised the same were from the state of Mississippi, with the majority residing in the Jackson metropolitan area. Seventy-nine percent of the subjects had grown up in the South. Inclusion in this study was limited to white women, as previous studies of this type have indicated that background experiences for white and black women were distinct enough to preclude combining subjects from both ethnic groups in drawing general conclusions about professional women's experiences.

Sixty one percent of the subjects were married, 18% had never married, and 21% were divorced or widowed. All but 3% of the subjects had attended college, 91% had college degrees, 56% had graduate degrees. Almost 90% of the subjects were raised the Protestant religion. Nearly 95% had been raised in two-parent families. The most typical family contained three children, and over half of the subjects were the oldest child. About half of the subjects had grown up in the 1950's, with another third growing up in the 1960's.

Subjects were selected by four methods: 1.) members of a local professional women's forum--of which one of the researcher's was a member--agreed to serve as subjects for the study, 2.) women enrolled in graduate classes taught by one of the researchers were included, 3.) personal acquaintances of the researchers were included, and 4.) professional women listed in the yellow pages of the local phone directory were solicited for includion in the study. There was a high level of interest in the study and a willingness to cooperate across all the professional groups included.

In the sample of 110 professional women, forty seven (42.7%) were in the traditional professions, twenty five (22.7%) were in the moderately nontraditional professions, fifteen (13.6%) were in the highly nontraditional professions, and twenty three (20.95) were in the business professions.

Procedure. The writer received an endorsement of the study from a professional women's forum in the metropolitan area. She announced the forthcoming study prior to the mailing of a cover letter, describing the nature and intent or the study and soliciting participation, and

accompanied by a four-page questionnaire. Similar cover letters and questionnaire were mailed to women in groups 3.) and 4.) described above. For group 2.) the letter and questionnaire were handed out during class to women who volunteered to participate in the study. Questionnaires were returned by mail. All information on the questionaires was kept anonymous.

The response format for the questionnaire utilized a Likertk-type scale for all the Lever play complexity items, identification of childhood play companions, and parental encouragement of behaviors.

Professional subgroups of subjects were manipulated in four ways. The traditional subgroup was compared with a combined moderate/high nontraditional subgroup (including business women); next a three-way comparison among traditionals, moderate nontraditionals (with business women included), and highly nontraditional professions; four-way comparison among traditionals, moderate nontraditionals, highly nontraditionals, and business women; and finally, a comparison between nonbusiness professionals and business professionals.

Data were tabulated and transferred to a Tandy 3000 personal computer for statistical treatment utilizing a SPSS statistical package

for PC's. Chi Square tests (with Yates Correction, where appropriate) for nonparametric data were run to determine differences in values aong the four groups of professional women for all independent variables. The t test for significant difference between means of fathers versus mothers was calculated for parental behavior encouragement items.

RESULTS

Personal/demographic characteristics. With one exception, no differences among subgroups of professional women were evident on these variables. Only marital status proved different for traditional versus nontraditional women. More women in traditional professions (35% + women) were married, while more women in nontraditional (including business) professions were single, divorced, or widowed (X^2 = 9.49, $p < .009$).

Women in traditional professions did not differ from women in nontraditional professions in their education levels, parents' educational levels, religion, age, rural versus urban upbringing, geographic area of upbringing, parents' occupations, family's socio-economic class, or dimensions of family structure such as one-parent versus two-parent family, number of children or birth order.

Complexity of play/leisure activity. No differences among the childhood play experiences on Lever's (1978) Play Complexity Scale were found for women in traditional professions versus those in nontraditional professions.

Differences on the Lever Scale were found in the current adult hobbies and avocations of the subjects. When business women were separated as a group from women in all the nonbusiness professions, they were found to participate in more complex avocational activities (X^2 = 11.25, $p < .046$). That is, business women engaged in leisure activities that were more interactive, rule-governed, goal-oriented, and called for more role specialization and divison of labor. Specifically, business women were more inclined to participate in activities like golf, tennis, skiing and sailing. Nonbusiness women tended to engage in more noninteractive and noncompetitive activities such as reading, gardening, cooking, and sewing.

Childhood activities and playthings. Subjects were asked to check childhood activities and playthings during preschool and middle childhood years from a comprehensive list. The list included a wide range of

activities such as hobbies, music, sports, creative play activities, family and club activities, as well as toys and play equipment. Significant differences were found between two subgroups of professional women on one variable: participation in competitive sports during middle childhood years. Women in business professions participated more in competitive sports than did women in the combined nonbusiness professions (X^2 = 8.51 $p < .003$).

Childhood play companions. No differences were found among the subgroups of professional women in the time spent playing with mothers or fathers during childhood. No differences were found among groups in the time spent as children playing with brothers or with groups of girls. Significant differences were found on two variables. Women in the highly nontraditional professions (< 20% women) and the business professions tended to play more as children with a group boys (X^2= 24.20, $p < .019$). In addition, women in the business professions tended as children to play less with sisters (X^2= 13.23, $p < .010$).

Parental encouragement of behaviors. The subjects were asked to comment on behaviors they perceived their parents as wanting them to

display during preschool and middle school years. For the group of professional women as a whole, few distinctions were found among the behaviors encouraged by fathers versus those encouraged by mothers. Three behaviors cold be differentiated by the parent who encourage it. Fathers of professional women were more likely than mothers to encourage their daughters to"Play to win" (t value - 3.43, p. < .001). Mothers were more inclined to encourage their daughters to "look pretty and by ladylike" (t value = -5.05, p. < .001), and to "Be considerate of others" (t value = -2.75, p. < .007).

Differences in encouragement of three behaviors by parents were found among subcategories of professional women. Women in the nontraditional professions were encouraged more by mothers to "stand up for your rights" than were women in traditional professions ($X^2 = 11.91$, p < .018). On the other hand, fathers of daughters going into the traditional professions provided more encouragement of them to "Be pleasant and obedient" (t value = 2.25, p. < .027) and "look pretty and be ladylike" (t value = 2.07, p. < .041) than did fathers of daughters in the nontraditional professions.

CONCLUSIONS

Chi square and t-tests for differences between means revealed significant differences among subgroups on several independent variables. Professional business women had participated more in competitive sports as children, and (along with women in other nontraditional professions) reported more male playmates and fewer female playmates than women in traditional professions. Forms of parental encouragement also differed among professional women. Fathers emphasized competitiveness while mothers emphasized consideration and ladylike behaviors. Women in nontraditional professions received different forms of parental encouragement than women in traditional professions.

Certainly more research is needed in this area. This study was limited by a number of circumstances. Subjects were limited to those individuals who returned the survey material, all subjects reside in a large southern urban area, all subjects were Caucasian.

Further research should include different geographic location, different ethnic origins, different occupations, traditional as well as nontraditional.

As Honig (1983) suggests after her review of the research,

> Concerned early childhood educators can then use these findings to make their own decisions about whether families and learning environments need to modify some of their current styles or interactions to increase chances for more egalitarian rearing of boys and girls. Some kinds of sex role socialization patterns are more likely than others to optimize children's chances for actualization in a broader arena of endeavors, rather than only in those areas where data suggest that one sex or the other is currently favored. (p. 59)

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